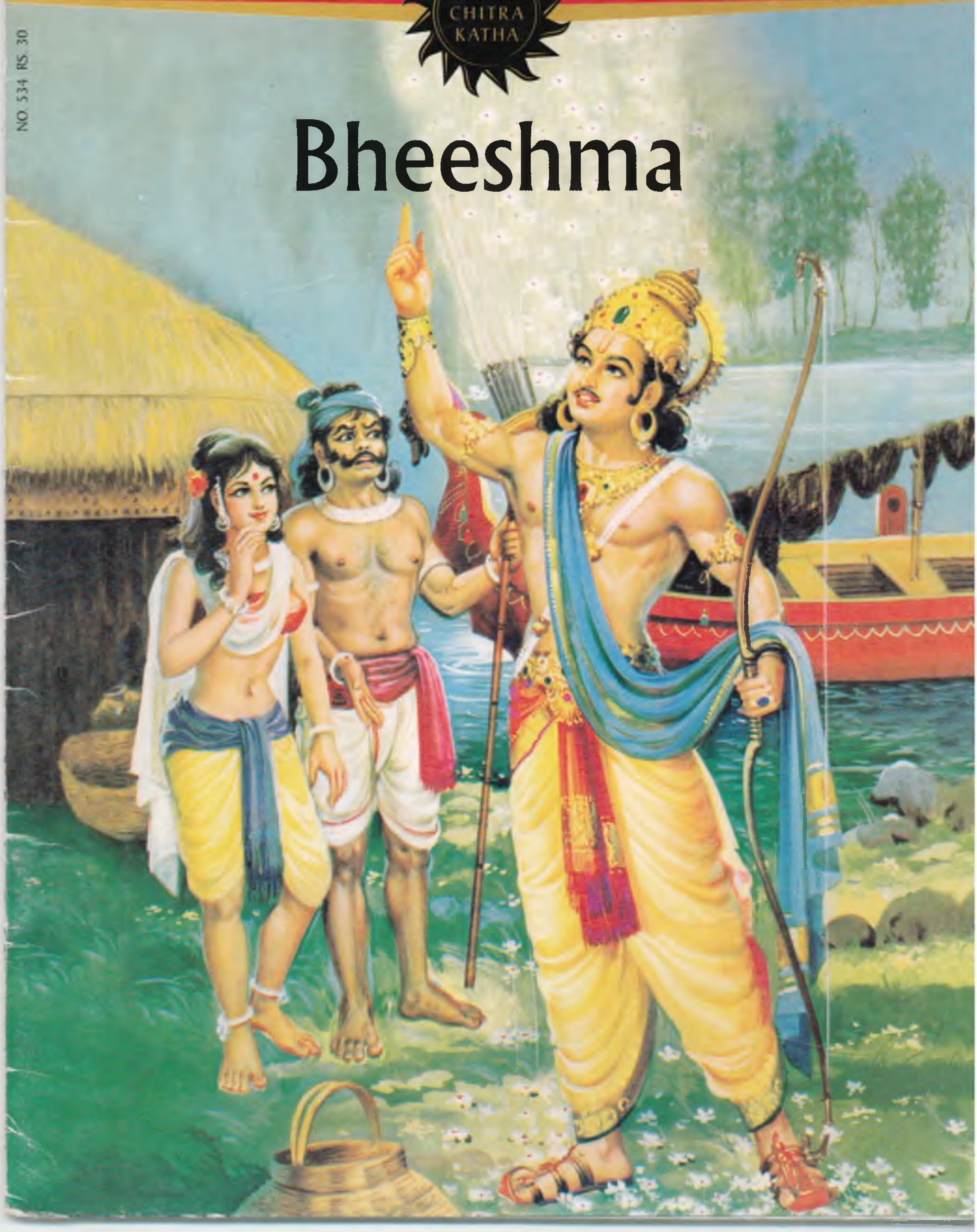
AMAR CHITRA KATHA

Bheeshma

NO 534 RS 30



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Bheeshma



ONE DAY, KING SHANTANU OF HASTINAPURA, WHOSE FAVOURITE PASTIME WAS HUNTING, WAS WALKING ALONG THE BANKS OF THE RIVER GANGA IN SEARCH OF DEER AND BISON.


SUDDENLY A BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN APPEARED IN FRONT OF HIM.
SHANTANU FELL IN LOVE WITH THE MAIDEN, AT FIRST SIGHT.
O DIVINE MAIDEN! WHOEVER YOU MAY BE AND WHEREVER YOU MAY COME FROM, I WANT TO MARRY YOU.
O KING I SHALL WILLINGLY BECOME YOUR WIFE. BUT ON NO ACOUNT MUST YOU ASK WHO I AM OR WHY I DO WHAT I DO..
AND YOU MUST NEVER SPEAK AN UNKIND WORD TO ME. THE MOMENT YOU DO EITHER, I SHALL LEAVE YOU FOREVER.
SO BE IT!

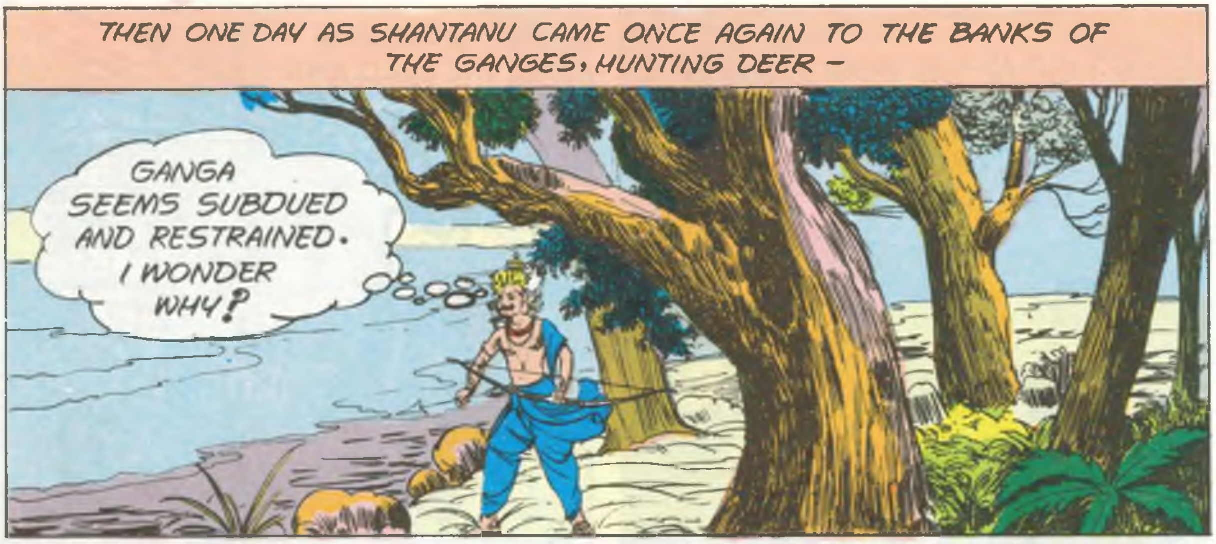

SHANTANU MARRIED THE MAIDEN AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY TOGETHER.

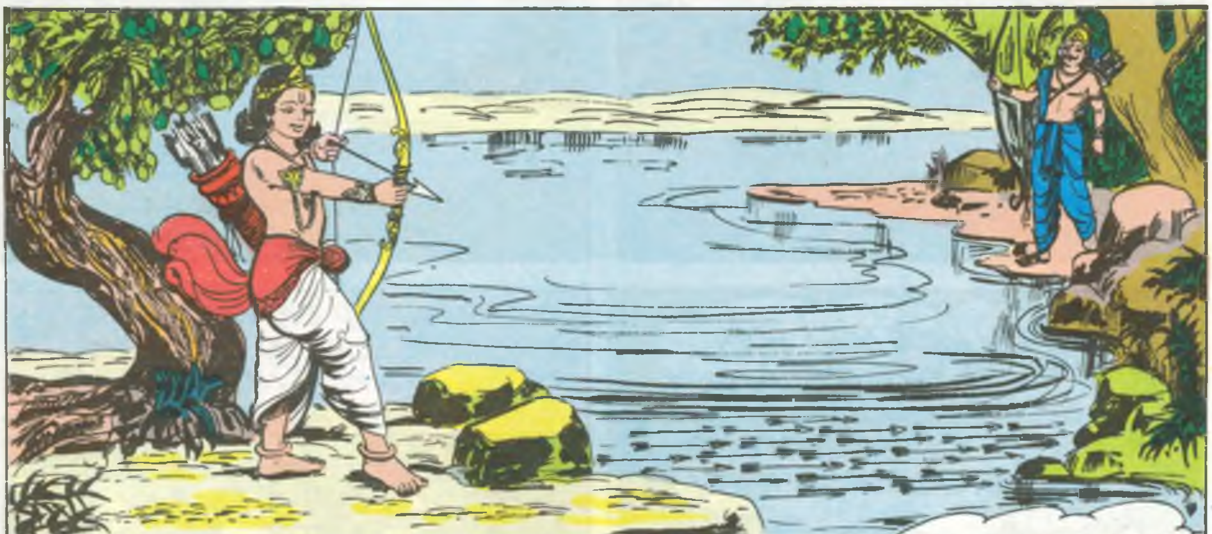

BUT HIS WIFE BEHAVED STRANGELY FOR A WOMAN. EACH TIME A CHILD WAS BORN TO HER, SHE DROWNED IT.
THIS IS FOR YOUR GOOD.


SHANTANU WAS TROUBLED.
IT SADDENS ME TO SEE EACH CHILD OF MINE KILLED. YET I DARE NOT QUESTION MY BELOVED WIFE LEST I LOSE HER ALTOGETHER.

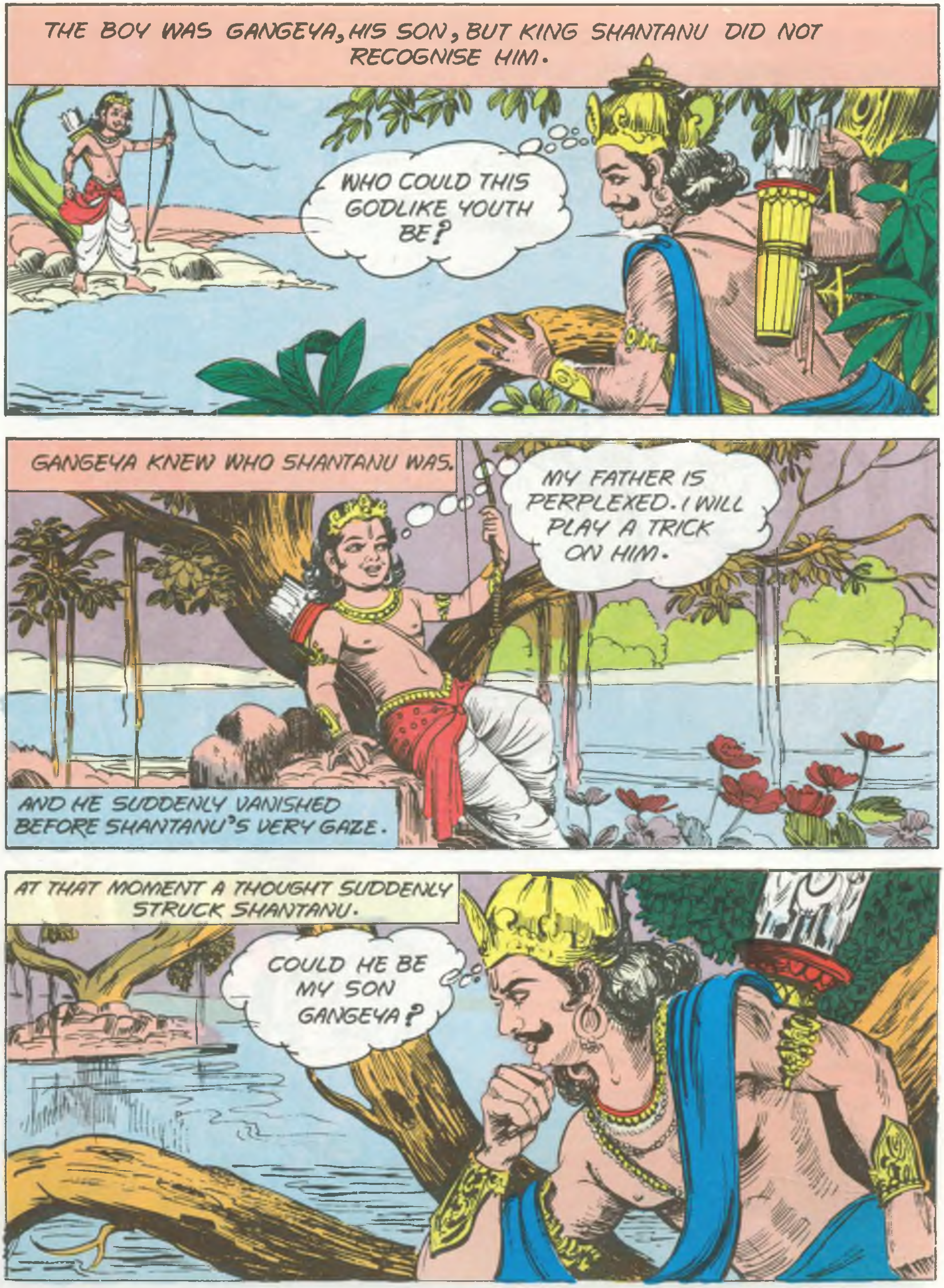

HOWEVER WHEN THE EIGHTH CHILD WAS BORN —
STOP! WHO ARE YOU? O WICKED WOMAN, HOW CAN YOU MURDER YOUR OWN CHILDREN?
ALAS! YOU HAVE BROKEN YOUR PROMISE. I AM THE GODDESS GANGA. THIS CHILD SHALL BE CALLED GANGEYA AFTER ME.
I HAD TO KILL OUR FIRST SEVEN CHILDREN, TO REDEEM THEM FROM A CURSE. THE EIGHTH CHILD WAS TO HAVE BEEN MINE AND WE COULD HAVE LIVED TO-GETHER FOREVER.


BUT AS YOU HAVE BROKEN YOUR PROMISE, I WILL HAVE TO LEAVE YOU NOW.
I SHALL TAKE THE CHILD WITH ME.
AND GODDESS GANGA DISAPPEARED.
ALAS! I HAVE LOST BOTH A DIVINE WIFE AND A GLORIOUS SON, BECAUSE I WAS IMPATIENT AND WAVERED IN MY FAITH.
BUT SHANTANU DID NOT LET HIS PERSONAL SORROW AFFECT HIS DUTIES AS A KING. HE CONTINUED RULING WISELY AND WELL.
OUR KING IS TRULY THE WISEST AND NOBLEST OF MEN.
IT IS INDEED UNFORTUNATE THAT HE HAS NO HEIR.
AND SO THE YEARS PASSED.

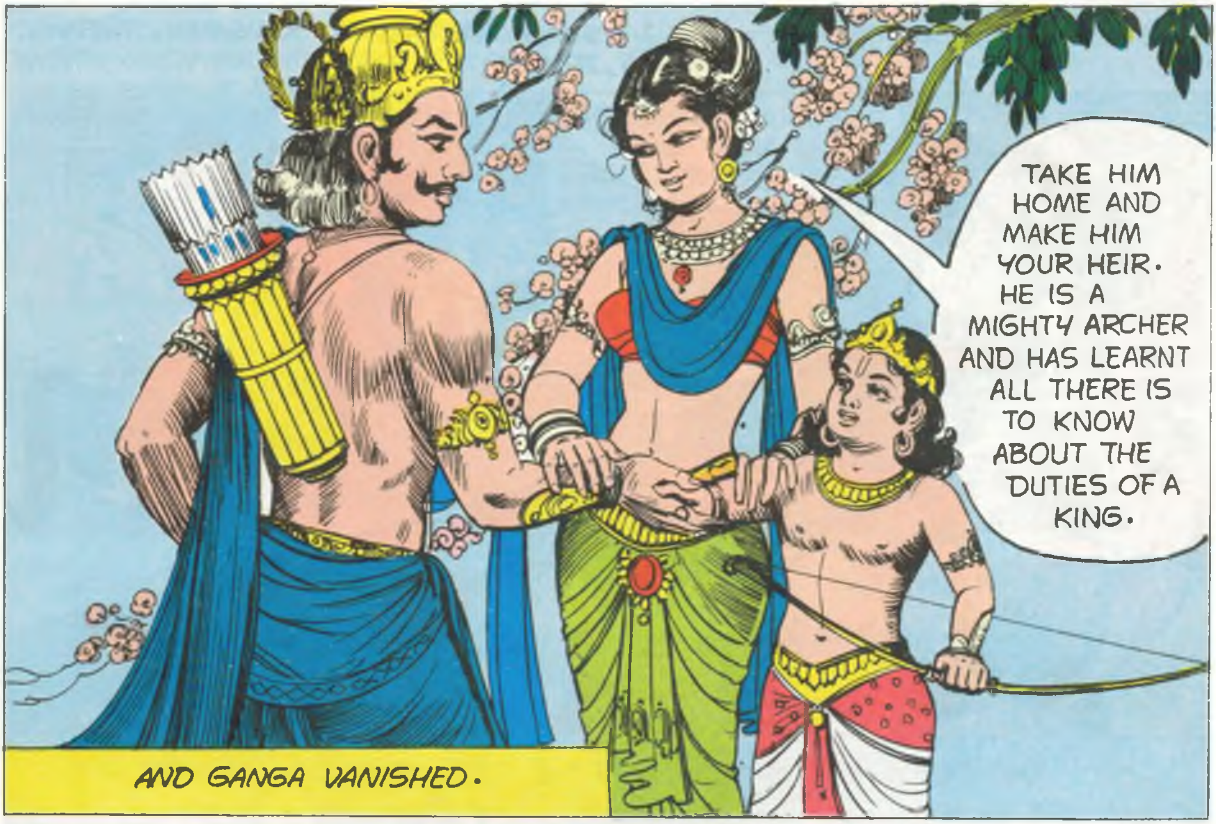

THEN ONE DAY AS SHANTANU CAME ONCE AGAIN TO THE BANKS OF THE GANGES, HUNTING DEER –
GANGA SEEMS SUBDUED AND RESTRAINED. I WONDER WHY?




SHANTANU WAS AMAZED.
AN EXTRAORDINARY FEAT WHICH ONLY ONE WITH DIVINE POWERS CAN PERFORM!

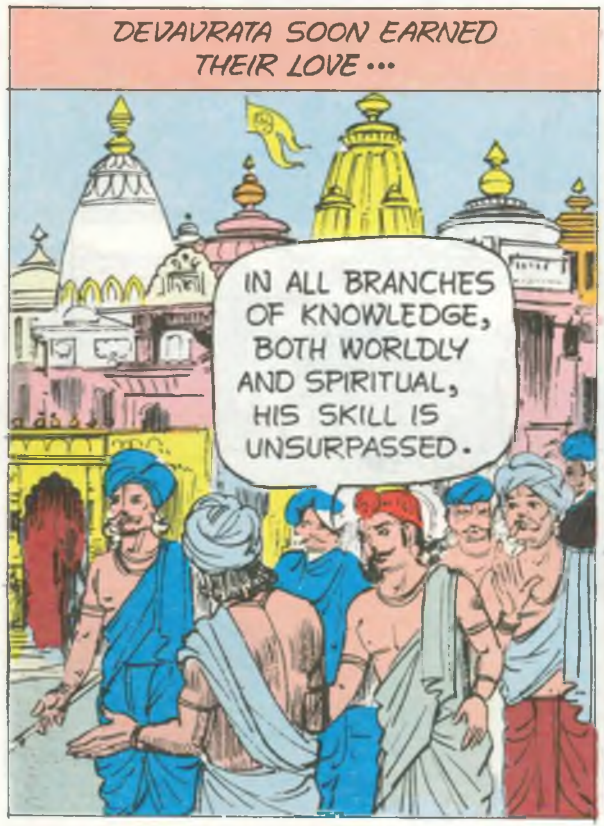

THE BOY WAS GANGEYA, HIS SON, BUT KING SHANTANU DID NOT RECOGNISE HIM.
WHO COULD THIS GODLIKE YOUTH BE?
GANGEYA KNEW WHO SHANTANU WAS.
MY FATHER IS PERPLEXED. I WILL PLAY A TRICK ON HIM.
AND HE SUDDENLY VANISHED BEFORE SHANTANU'S VERY GAZE.
AT THAT MOMENT A THOUGHT SUDDENLY STRUCK SHANTANU.
COULD HE BE MY SON GANGEYA?

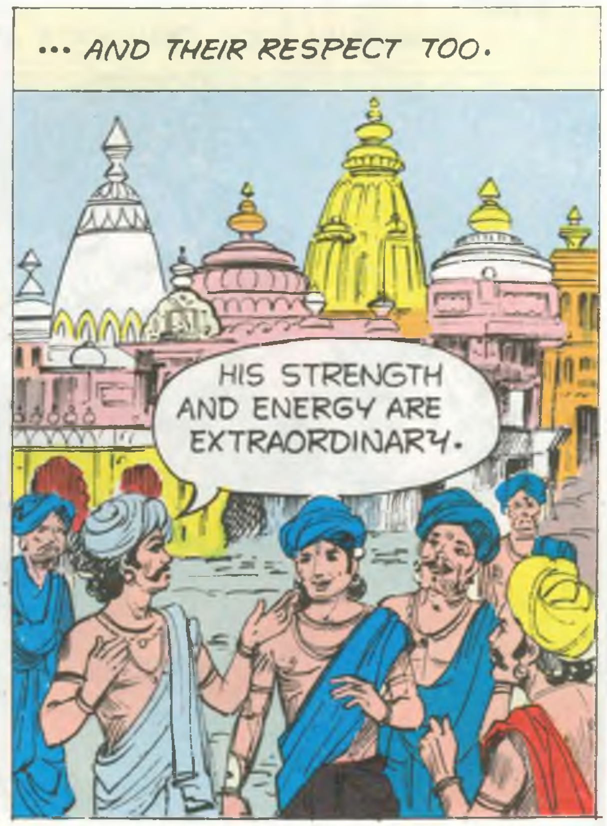

HE CALLED OUT IMPLORINGLY TO GANGA.
PLEASE SHOW YOURSELF AND THAT MARVELLOUS YOUTH. ISN'T HE MINE?
THIS IS GANGEYA, THE EIGHTH SON I BORE YOU.
HE IS UNSURPASSED IN WISDOM AND THE USE OF WEAPONS. HE HAS EARNED THE TITLE DEVAVRATA.


TAKE HIM HOME AND MAKE HIM YOUR HEIR. HE IS A MIGHTY ARCHER AND HAS LEARNT ALL THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT THE DUTIES OF A KING.
AND GANGA VANISHED.


SHANTANU TOOK DEVAVRATA AND RETURNED HOME JOYFULLY.


WHEN THEY REACHED HIS PALACE HE SUMMONED ALL HIS KINSMEN, THE PAURAVAS, TO HIM.
DEVAVRATA SHALL BE THE HEIR TO MY THRONE.
THE PAURAVAS LOOKING UPON THE GODLIKE YOUTH, ADMIRED HIM.


DEVAVRATA SOON EARNED THEIR LOVE ...
IN ALL BRANCHES OF KNOWLEDGE, BOTH WORLDLY AND SPIRITUAL, HIS SKILL IS UNSURPASSED.


... AND THEIR RESPECT TOO.
HIS STRENGTH AND ENERGY ARE EXTRAORDINARY.


SHANTANU WAS HAPPY TO HAVE SUCH A WORTHY SON AND HEIR. BUT STILL HE FELT LONELY AT TIMES.
AT SUCH MOMENTS, HE TOOK LONG WALKS, ALONE, ALONG THE BANKS OF THE YAMUNA.
ON ONE SUCH WALK –
AH! WHAT A DIVINE FRAGRANCE! WHERE IS IT FROM?


JUST THEN HE SAW A BEAUTIFUL GIRL APPROACHING.
WHO ARE YOU?
I AM SATYAVATI, THE DAUGHTER OF A FISHERMAN.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I FERRY PASSENGERS ACROSS THIS RIVER IN MY BOAT.
KING SHANTANU WAS OVERCOME BY A DESIRE TO MAKE SATYAVATI HIS OWN AND TAKE HER TO HIS PALACE.
HER FRAGRANT PERFUME SHALL FILL MY LONELY HOURS.
I SHALL GO AND ASK HER FATHER FOR HER HAND.


HE WENT TO SATYAVATI'S FATHER.
I WISH TO TAKE YOUR DAUGHTER FOR MY WIFE.
O KING! I CAN NEVER OBTAIN A HUSBAND FOR HER EQUAL TO YOU. BUT... I WISH...
WHAT IS IT THAT YOU WISH? NAME IT!
THAT THE SON BORN UNTO MY DAUGHTER SHALL REIGN AFTER YOU.
IF YOU CAN PROMISE ME THAT, SHE IS YOURS.


SHANTANU WAS DISMAYED.
HOW CAN I DISINHERIT MY DEVAVRATA?
HE RETURNED TO HIS PALACE, HIS THOUGHTS FULL OF SATYAVATI.
AND YET MY LIFE IS MEANINGLESS IF I CANNOT MARRY SATYAVATI.
AT HASTINAPUR HE PASSED HIS DAYS, LOST IN HIS LONGINGS. ONE DAY–
FATHER, WHY ARE YOU SAD? YOU HAVE EVERYTHING A KING CAN WANT– PROSPERITY, LOYAL SUBJECTS, AN HEIR...

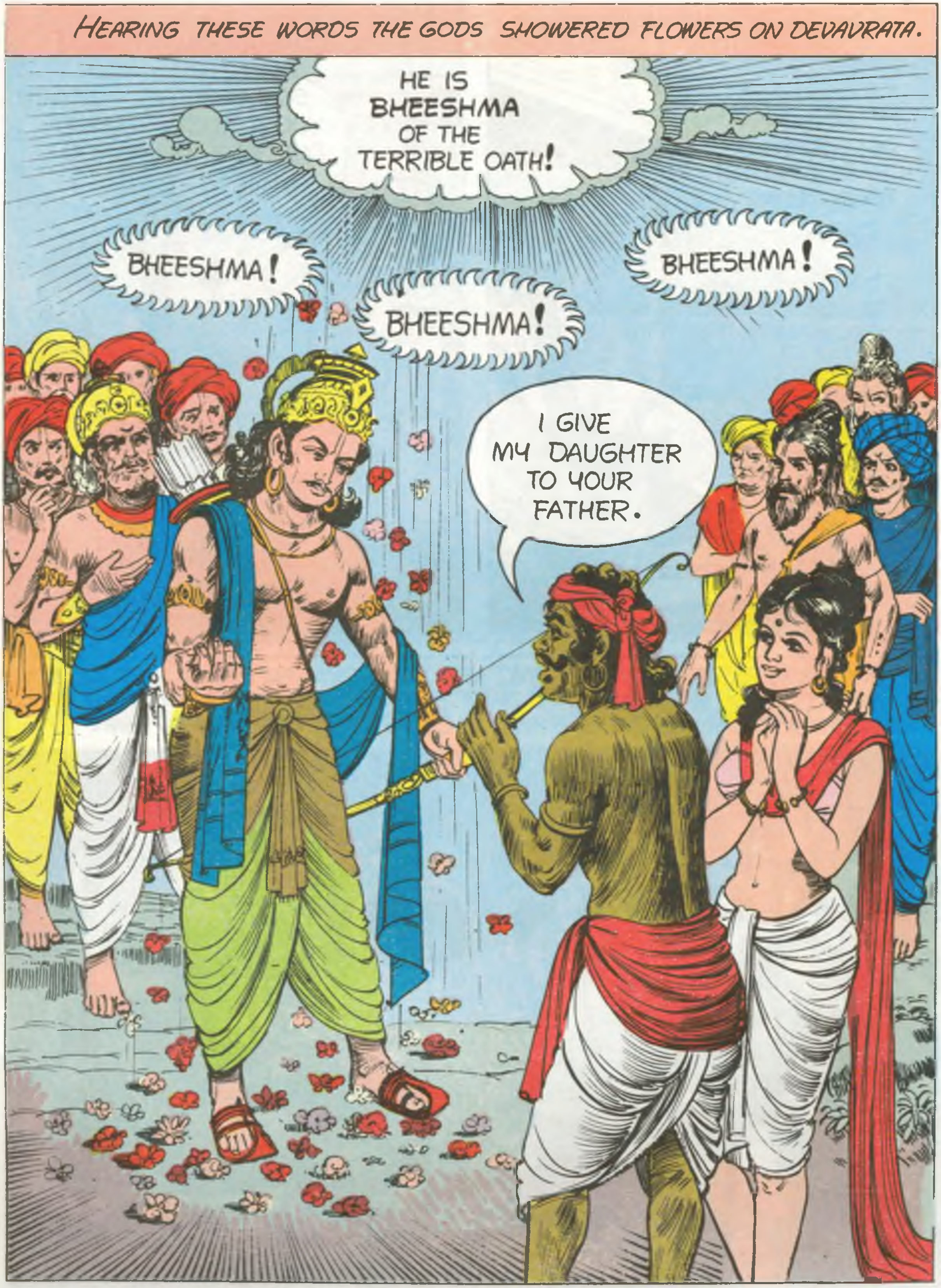

SHANTANU WAS QUICK TO ANSWER.
YOU ARE MY ONLY SON. YOU ARE AN EXCELLENT ARCHER AND YOU WELCOME COMBATS.
SUPPOSING YOU ARE SLAIN, WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE BHARAT DYNASTY? IT IS THIS THOUGHT THAT WORRIES ME.
BUT DEVAVRATA WAS TOO INTELLIGENT TO BE TAKEN IN BY THESE WORDS.
I MUST FIND OUT WHAT SECRET LONGING NAGS MY FATHER.


SO HE WENT TO AN OLD MINISTER WHO WAS DEVOTED TO HIS FATHER.
REVERED SIR, WHY DOES MY FATHER GRIEVE SO?
HE HAS SET HIS HEART ON SATYAVATI, THE FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER.
WELL. WHY DOESN'T HE MARRY HER? THAT SHOULD NOT BE VERY DIFFICULT.
THE MINISTER HESITATED FOR A SECOND. THEN—
HER FATHER WILL GIVE HIS CONSENT ONLY IF SHANTANU PROMISES THAT HER SON WILL BE HIS HEIR.


DEVAVRATA, ACCOMPANIED BY A FEW ELDERLY PAURAVA CHIEFS, WENT TO SATYAVATI'S FATHER.
WHAT IS YOUR OBJECTION TO GIVING YOUR DAUGHTER TO MY FATHER?
HE ALREADY HAS AN HEIR IN YOU. WHAT CHANCES WOULD MY GRANDSON HAVE AGAINST YOU?
HE WOULD BE CONDEMNED TO A LIFE OF SUBORDINATION.
UPON HEARING THESE WORDS DEVAVRATA TOOK AN OATH.
I VOW THAT THE SON BORN OF YOUR DAUGHTER SHALL REIGN AS THE KING.


BUT THE FISHERMAN WAS NOT SATISFIED.
I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT YOU WILL KEEP YOUR WORD. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SONS YOU MAY HAVE?
DEVAVRATA DID NOT INTEND TO GO WITHOUT WINNING SATYAVATI FOR HIS FATHER.
CHIEF OF FISHERMEN, I HAVE GIVEN UP MY RIGHT TO THE THRONE. I NOW SETTLE THE MATTER OF MY CHILDREN.
AND DEVAVRATA TOOK A TERRIBLE OATH.
FROM THIS DAY I VOW TO REMAIN *A BRAHMACHARIN

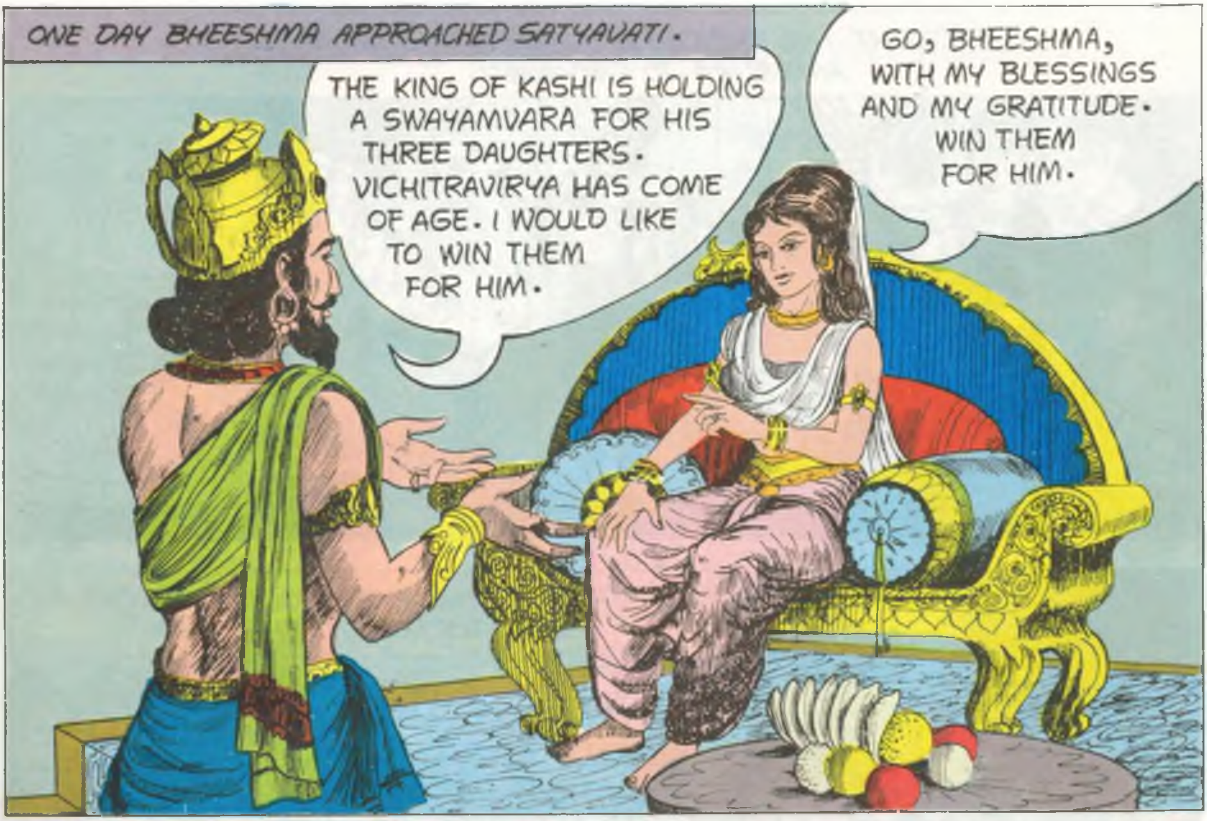
* BACHELOR

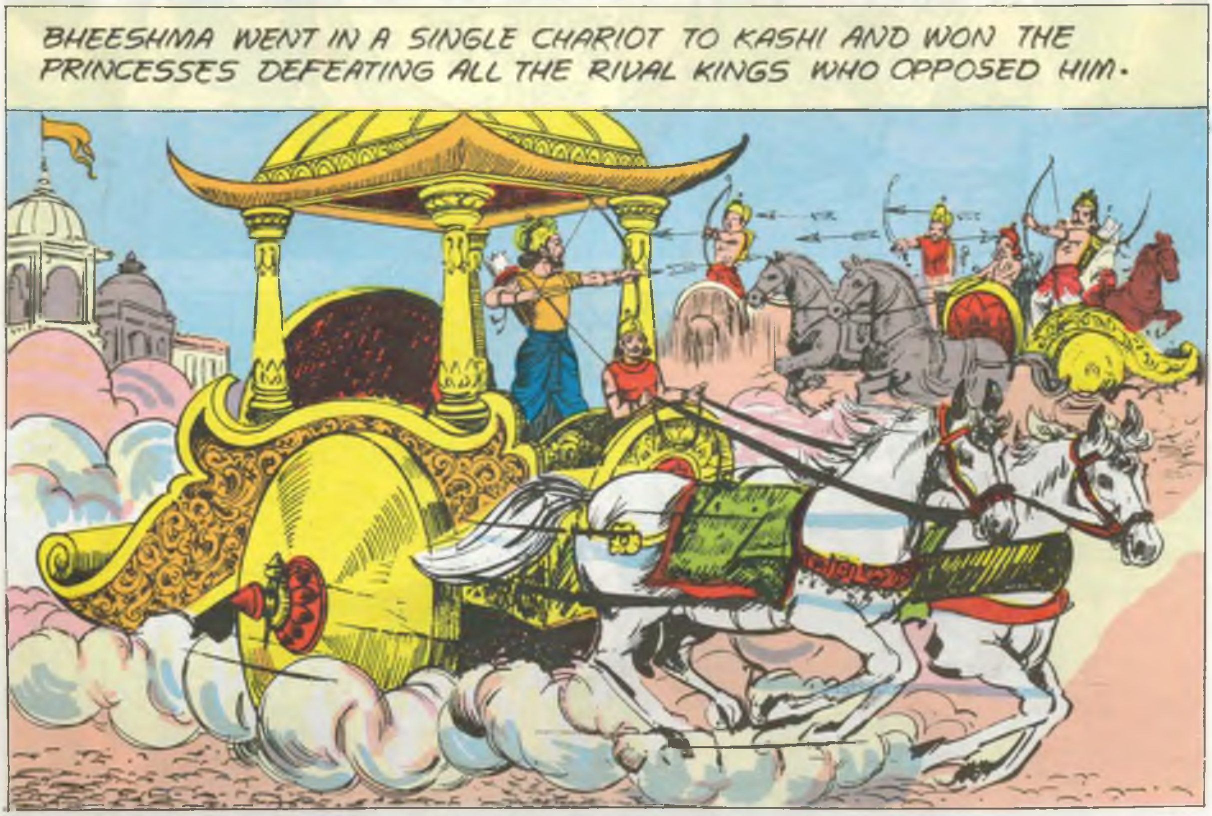

HEARING THESE WORDS THE GODS SHOWERED FLOWERS ON DEVAVRATA.
HE IS BHEESHMA OF THE TERRIBLE OATH!
BHEESHMA!
BHEESHMA!
BHEESHMA!
I GIVE MY DAUGHTER TO YOUR FATHER.


BHEESHMA WENT TO SATYAVATI.
MOTHER, ASCEND THIS CHARIOT AND LET US GO HOME.

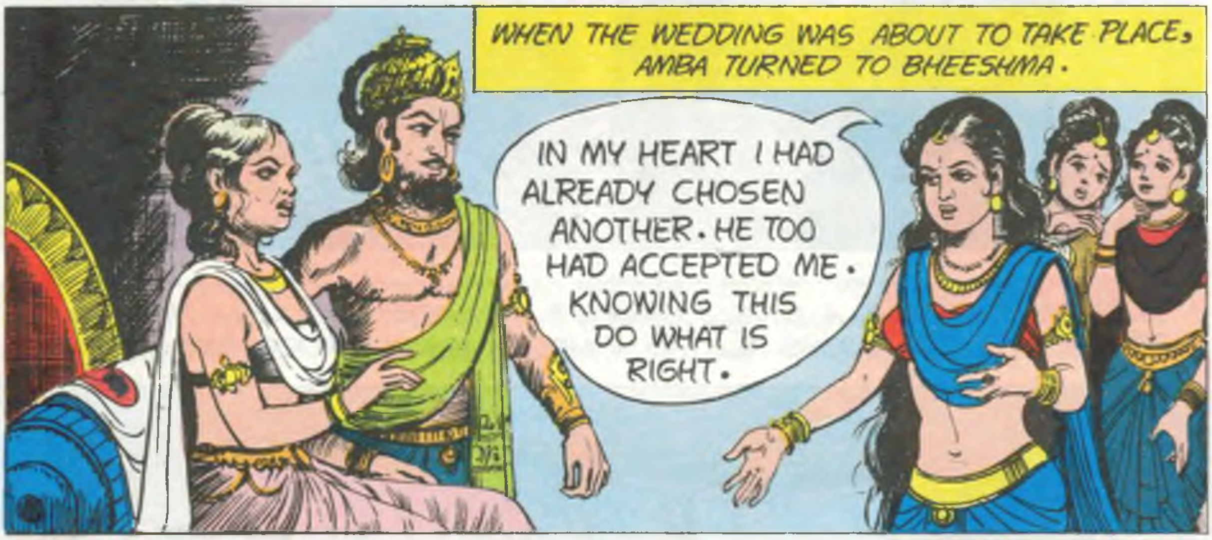

AT HASTINAPUR BHEESHMA TOLD SHANTANU EVERYTHING.
SON, FOR THIS I GRANT YOU A BOON. YOU WILL DIE ONLY WHEN YOU WISH TO.


SHANTANU MARRIED SATYAVATI AND HAD TWO SONS. THE ELDER WAS KILLED IN BATTLE. WHEN SHANTANU DIED, BHEESHMA SET THE YOUNGER SON, VICHITRAVIRYA ON THE THRONE AND RULED THE KINGDOM FOR HIM.


ONE DAY BHEESHMA APPROACHED SATYAVATI.
THE KING OF KASHI IS HOLDING A SWAYAMVARA FOR HIS THREE DAUGHTERS. VICHITRAVIRYA HAS COME OF AGE. I WOULD LIKE TO WIN THEM FOR HIM.
GO, BHEESHMA, WITH MY BLESSINGS AND MY GRATITUDE. WIN THEM FOR HIM.


BHEESHMA WENT IN A SINGLE CHARIOT TO KASHI AND WON THE PRINCESSES DEFEATING ALL THE RIVAL KINGS WHO OPPOSED HIM.


HE BROUGHT THE PRINCESSES AMBA, AMBIKA AND AMBALIKA TO SATYAVATI.
LUCK WAS WITH YOU, MY SON.


WHEN THE WEDDING WAS ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE, AMBA TURNED TO BHEESHMA.
IN MY HEART I HAD ALREADY CHOSEN ANOTHER. HE TOO HAD ACCEPTED ME. KNOWING THIS DO WHAT IS RIGHT.

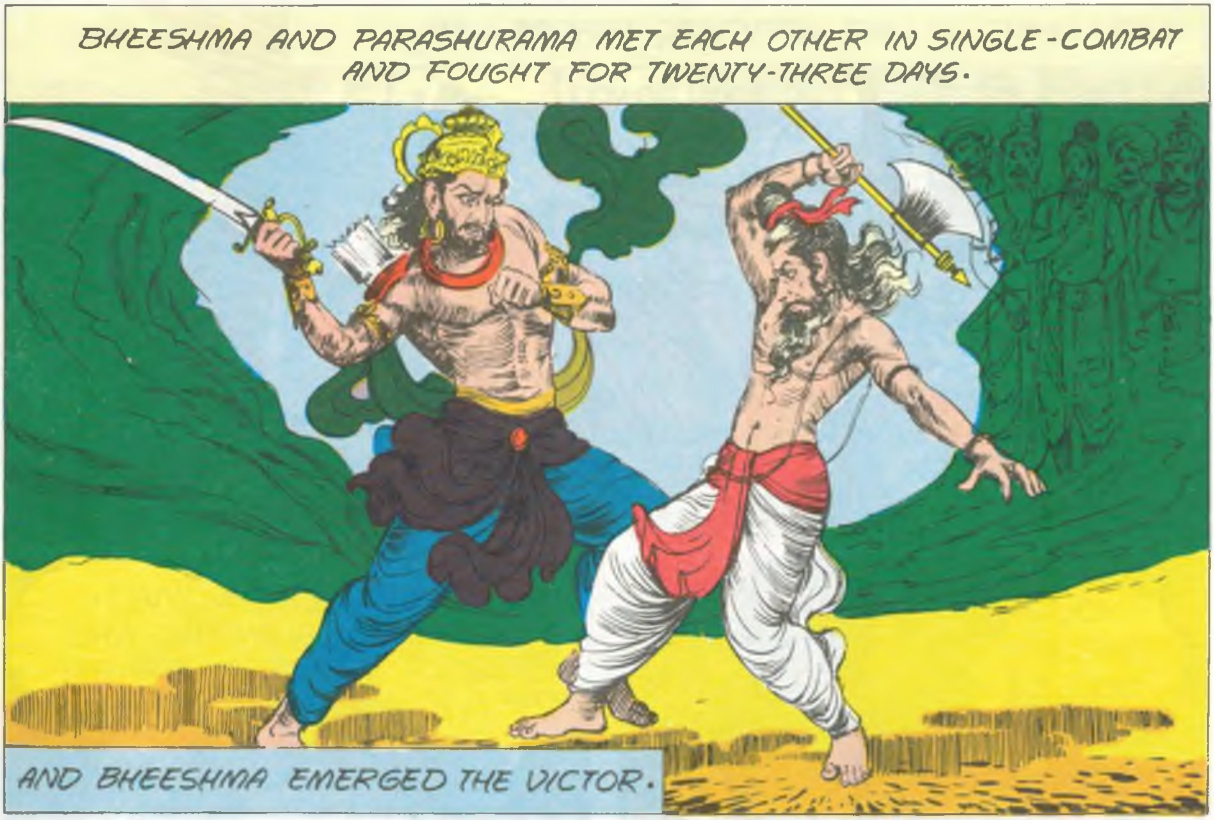

BHEESHMA REFLECTED UPON WHAT SHOULD BE DONE, THEN DECIDED.
I GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO DO AS YOU CHOOSE.


VICHITRAVIRYA WAS MARRIED TO AMBIKA AND AMBALIKA.


AMBA WENT BACK TO HER CHOSEN LORD, BUT –
I NO LONGER WISH TO MARRY YOU AS YOU WERE CARRIED AWAY FOR ANOTHER.


AMBA WAS FURIOUS.
BHEESHMA IS THE CAUSE OF ALL MY SUFFERING. I WILL DESTROY HIM.


SHE WENT TO PARASHURAMA, THE SAGE WHO HATED KSHATRIYAS, AND TOLD HIM HER TALE.
I BESEECH YOU, O VENERABLE ONE. SLAY BHEESHMA AND AVENGE ME.
PARASHURAMA ACCOMPANIED BY AMBA AND OTHER ASCETICS WENT TO HASTINAPURA AND BHEESHMA CAME TO PAY HIM HIS RESPECTS.
WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, O VENERABLE SAGE?
YOU WILL MARRY AMBA.
I CANNOT BREAK MY VOW. BESIDES SHE WANTED TO BE FREE.
THEN I WILL HAVE TO SLAY YOU.


BHEESHMA AND PARASHURAMA MET EACH OTHER IN SINGLE-COMBAT AND FOUGHT FOR TWENTY-THREE DAYS.
AND BHEESHMA EMERGED THE VICTOR.


PARASHURAMA WENT TO AMBA.
I TRIED MY BEST BUT I FAILED. I ADVISE YOU TO FORGET YOUR HUMILIATION AND SEEK BHEESHMA'S PROTECTION.
I CANNOT.


AMBA PERFORMED SEVERE PENANCES FOR TWELVE YEARS TO WIN THE GRACE OF LORD SHIVA.


LORD SHIVA, AT LAST, APPEARED BEFORE HER.
WHAT BOON DO YOU SEEK OF ME?
I WISH TO SLAY BHEESHMA. HE HAS DEPRIVED ME OF MY RIGHTS AS A WOMAN.
YOU SHALL DO SO!
BUT I AM A MERE WOMAN. HOW SHALL I SLAY HIM WHO DEFEATED THE MIGHTY PARASHU-RAMA?
YOU WILL BE REBORN AS SHIKHANDIN, THE SON OF DRUPADA.
AND SHIVA DISAPPEARED.

AMBA MADE A FUNERAL PYRE, LIT IT AND JUMPED INTO ITS FLAMES.



AND AS SHIVA PROMISED SHE WAS REBORN AND BECAME SHIKHANDIN.

HER SISTERS IN THE MEANWHILE HAD HAD A SON EACH – DHRITA-RASHTRA AND PANDU, WHOSE SONS WERE THE HUNDRED KAURAVAS AND FIVE PANDAVAS RESPECTIVELY.

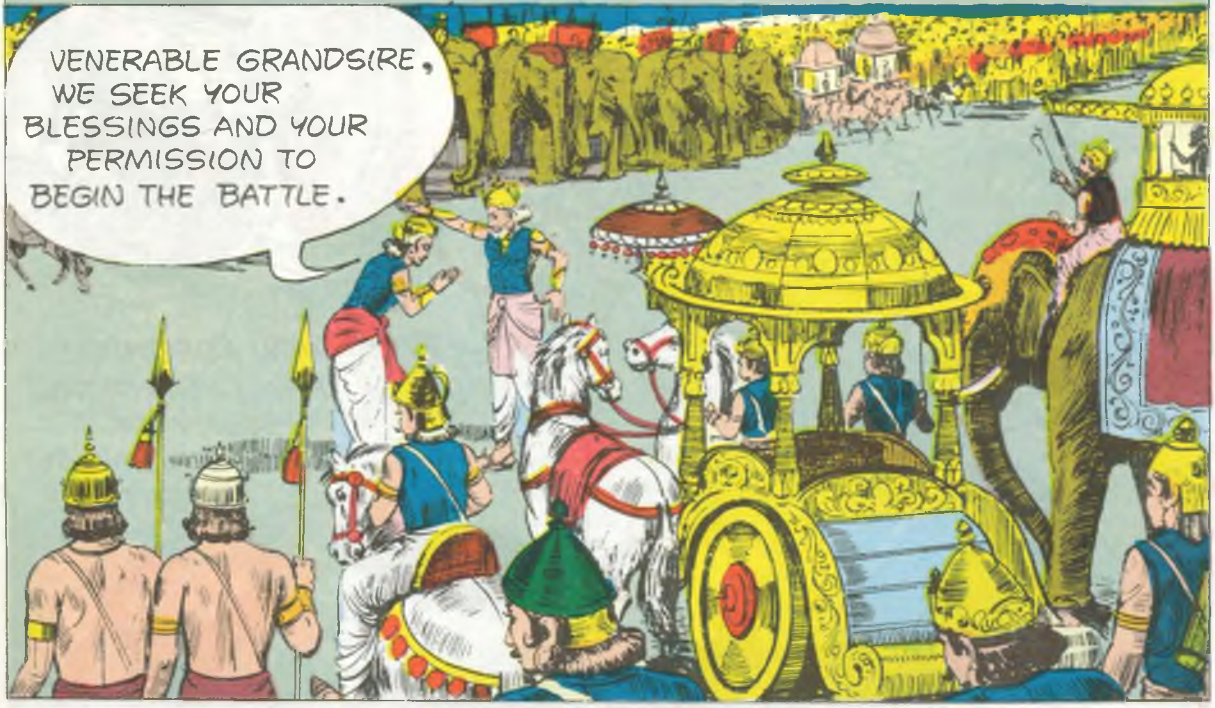



BHEESHMA SUPERVISED THE UPBRINGING OF THESE COUSINS AS HE HAD DONE THAT OF THEIR PARENTS.


BHEEMA ALWAYS BULLIES US!
AND THE ELDERS TAKE HIS SIDE!


THE CHILDHOOD ENMITY CONTINUED INTO THEIR ADULT LIFE.
IF THE PANDAVAS WANT THEIR SHARE OF THE KINGDOM, LET THEM FIGHT FOR IT.
GIVE THEM WHAT IS THEIRS AND AVOID TROUBLE.
BUT THE KAURAVAS DID NOT HEED HIM

AND WAR BROKE OUT BETWEEN THE KAURAVAS AND THE PANDAVAS – THE GREAT 18-DAY WAR OF THE MAHABHARATA. ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE BATTLE THE ELDEST PANDAVA CAME TO BHEESHMA.



BHEESHMA LOVED BOTH, THE PANDAVAS AND THE KAURAVAS, BUT HE WAS DUTY-BOUND TO FIGHT ON THE SIDE OF THE KAURAVAS. THEY WERE THE SONS OF THE REIGNING KING, DHRITARASHTRA.



FOR NINE DAYS BHEESHMA AND THE KAURAVA ARMIES FOUGHT RELENTLESSLY AGAINST THE PANDAVA ARMIES. DRUPADA'S SON SHIKHANDIN WAS AN ALLY OF THE PANDAVAS.


ON THE TENTH DAY OF THE BATTLE, ARJUNA, THE PANDAVA, SHIELDING HIMSELF BEHIND SHIKHANDIN, ATTACKED BHEESHMA.
SHIKHANDIN WAS ONCE A GIRL. I CANNOT ATTACK HIM.
HOW FORTUNATE THAT I HEARD THE STORY OF SHIKHANDIN LAST NIGHT.
THE TIME DRAWS NEAR. I WISH TO DIE BUT NOT AT THE HANDS OF SHIKHANDIN.
THEN HE FELT THE ARROWS THAT HAD PIERCED HIM DEEPEST.
THE FATAL ARROWS ARE ARJUNA'S! I AM READY.
AND BHEESHMA FELL.


BOTH ARMIES STOPPED FIGHTING AND CROWDED AROUND THEIR BELOVED GRANDSIRE.
I NEED A SUPPORT FOR MY HEAD.
ARJUNA IMMEDIATELY PLACED THREE ARROWS UNDER BHEESHMA'S HEAD.
FINE! A PILLOW BEFITTING A WARRIOR. NOW I AM THIRSTY.
AT ONCE ARJUNA SHOT AN ARROW INTO THE EARTH NEAR BHEESHMA'S HEAD.
BHEESHMA DRANK AND WAS HAPPY.



THE PANDAVAS WON THE WAR. YUDHISHTHIRA, THE ELDEST OF THEM, CAME TO BHEESHMA FOR HIS BLESSINGS AND HIS ADVICE ON THE DUTIES OF A KING. AS BHEESHMA FINISHED TALKING IT WAS THE AUSPICIOUS MOMENT HE HAD CHOSEN FOR HIS DEATH AND HIS SOUL PASSED AWAY.

AMAR CHITRA KATHA

Illustrated Classics From India

Bheeshma

In ancient days, when the king was second only to god in power and authority, a young prince, Devavrata, declined a grand kingdom. He reinforced his refusal of the throne by a vow of celibacy so that no offspring of his could come forth to claim it either. He took this difficult decision to please his father Shantanu, and was thereafter hailed by the gods as "Bheeshma" "of the terrible oath".

It is ironical that Bheeshma, who declined to be a king, wielded royal power longer than any other king of that dynasty. He was the regent for his stepbrothers and for his nephews. Yet, all this was not of his choosing - he had to rule despite his renunciation until Duryodhana came of age.

It was perhaps because he had guarded Dhritarashtra's throne all his life that he sided with Duryodhana against the Pandava princes in the great Mahabharata war and remained loyal to his king. Bheeshma commanded the Kaurava army, and as a soldier and a leader, he was invincible.

Editor: Anant Pai

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